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Camille’s Para taekwondo ambition

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 Paralympics New Zealand

In the first of our series profiling members of Intake 2 of the [Para Sport Collective](#) we put the spotlight on the inspirational taekwondo exponent, coach and administrator Camille Pruckmuller.

When it comes to the sport of taekwondo nothing is too much trouble for Camille Pruckmuller.

With a taekwondo association spanning 40 years, Camille has earned a black belt, as an instructor guided numerous others to black belt status, set up her own taekwondo club and last year was appointed as Taekwondo NZ (TNZ) [Para Taekwondo](#) Development Officer.

Retaining her passion and enthusiasm for the sport today the indefatigable 61-year-old grandmother-of-eight runs a club of 160 members, which includes a sizeable group of around 20 disabled people. Through this an interest and curiosity for coaching those with a disability has grown and now in her new role with TNZ her aim is clear.

“New Zealand does not have a Para taekwondo team and that is what I hope to develop,” she says. “To get Kiwis competing in Para taekwondo in the future would be fantastic.”

Camille’s journey to taekwondo dates back to the the 1980s. A relationship breakdown led to her feeling both “down and lonely” and looking for a pursuit to “better herself” she was attracted to a ladies self-defence class in Havelock North.

Completing the six-week course her life was to change forever after an instructor identified her potential and suggest she try the sport of taekwondo.

“I was surprised by the reaction,” explains Camille, who is part of the second intake of the Para Sport Collective as one of two National Sports Organisation (NSO) observers. “I hadn’t been spoken to in that way and told that I could be really good at something.”

Encouraged by the instructor’s words she joined the ITF Taekwondo Federation Club in Havelock North. Training twice a week she loved the dynamism and discipline required to excel in the sport and over time progressed through the grades. Readyng herself to start her journey into becoming a black belt she fell pregnant in 1988 with the second of her four children. While this shelved plans to achieve her next personal grading goal it inadvertently kick-started her coaching journey.

“I was asked to teach the kids at the back of the classroom, and I was amazed at the progress and what I could get the other kids to do,” recalls Camille. “I loved watching the kids faces when they achieved something they previously did not think was possible. “

“I had a natural ability to break it down and teach taekwondo,” she adds. “Everyone learns slightly differently, some study from a book, others watch, some have to do it physically.”

Over time, Camille attained black belt status in the traditional Korean martial art and after the Master of the club she was attending relocated to Auckland – Camille opted to set up her own club which was initially based in her Hastings garage. Continuing to practice taekwondo, her coaching experiences were broadened during this period by instructing a number of neuro-diverse young people.

“I would often find that many of these kids had a weakness on one side of the body, so I just adapted my taekwondo lesson to allow them to strengthen both sides more evenly,” she explains. “It was not long before the parents were saying the kids were a lot more settled and that they couldn’t wait to get back from school to training.”

A further illustration of Camille’s adaptable and empathetic style of coaching is evident in her developing and implementing her own grading system. The very nature of martial arts is founded on discipline and conformity but realising this could be a turn off for some she has fought to soften some of the existing rules to help increase participation.

“Some people won’t even try martial arts because they are not a black belt,” explains Camille. “Everyone starts at white belt but to offer great incentives I adopt my own grading system. For me, it doesn’t matter about your ability I will reward kids with a tip on their belt if they have done well in the class. Once you get four tips you can progress to the next grading colour. I’m fairly certain I was the first person that made that happen in martial arts in New Zealand.”

Camille also stresses that a sport founded on discipline can sometimes lead to a negative response for anyone who is late for practice. Preferring a more sympathetic approach she says, “If someone is running late they are likely to feel very embarrassed, so to those people I always give them a smile when they arrive and make them feel welcome.”

Previously leading the Bay City Club in Napier in 2020 this was later re-branded as Koryo Taekwondo Club in her native Hastings. Initially starting with just six members it has rapidly expanded to now including 160 members including 20 with a disability. Working with a range of disabilities from cerebral palsy, down syndrome, deafness, visual impairment plus a range of other disabilities is a challenge Camille has faced with relish.

“I assess each person when they come in and find out what they can do and what we need to work on,” she explains. “I take each person individually. The sport is of huge benefit to everyone. It offers great fitness and camaraderie and there are always others willing to support you.”

Calling the group “diversity” she has trained three members of the group to black belt status and now they coach the others in the group with Camille adopting more of an overseeing role. The trio – one of whom has down syndrome, one a brain-related injury and the other born with fetal alcohol syndrome – are a huge inspiration for the rest of the group. There is little doubting their quality as each holds New Zealand and Australian titles in fighting and poomsae – a sequence of taekwondo techniques linked to a pattern of moves.


Proud to have become the first ever TNZ Para Taekwondo Development Officer in February (7-9) she plans to host the inaugural Paralympics Taekwondo Training Camp to help forge a pathway to top national and international competition. With the dream of developing Para taekwondo athletes from New Zealand to compete at future Paralympic Games she insists her time with the Para Sport Collective – which is supported by ACC – has served her well for her future ambitions.


“It has really opened my eyes to people with a disability who are getting on with their lives, doing what they love,” she adds. “It has made me think if they can do it, I can do it too and I’d love to be able to help people achieve their goals.”


To get involved in Para sport go [here \(opens a new tab\)](#).

If you are interested in finding out more about the Paralympics New Zealand (PNZ) LevelUp coaching modules go [here \(opens a new tab\)](#).

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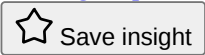
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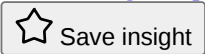
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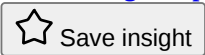
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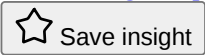
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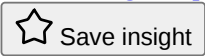
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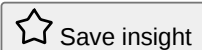
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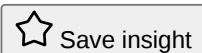
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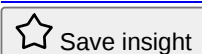
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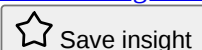
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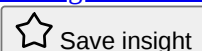
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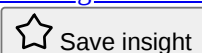
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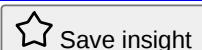


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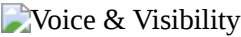
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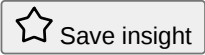
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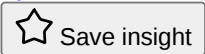
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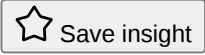
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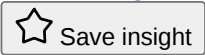
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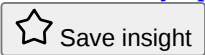
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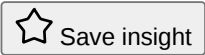
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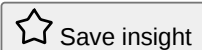
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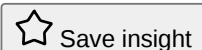
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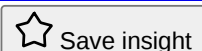
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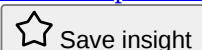
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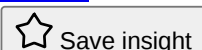
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